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The Poetry of the Icon: Thinking God's Essencing with Heidegger and Marion

Introduction

Last night, as I slept,
I dreamt - marvelous error! -
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.
-Antonio Machado

Martin Heidegger's whole project is the question of Being, a question which for him has long been kept unthought by Western philosophy because metaphysics has been concerned only with beings. Heidegger calls this inability to think Being as such as the oblivion of Being which is made possible by calculative or representational thinking. Finding its fulfilment in science and technology, this kind of thinking places man as the "orderer" of the world, the master of truth "on the basis of the consequential correctness of its procedure"¹ which "fixes upon something pertinent in whatever is under consideration."² With everything understood as to what is

¹Martin Heidegger, Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 235.

²Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other*

calculable, and truth as mere correctness, our world, Heidegger says, is flooded with objects; with beings fixed on what can be calculated and can be represented.

Western metaphysics, Heidegger argues, is always onto-theo-logical. Its logos is to find what accounts for beings or what grounds everything. Metaphysics cannot think other than the ground and what is grounded, i.e. with cause-effect relation. For Heidegger, “[w]hen metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theo-logic.”³

For Heidegger, to think is to ask, “What is it that enjoins our essential being to think and thus lets it arrive in thinking, there to shelter it?”⁴ This is what he also calls as essential or originary thinking which is “attentive to the truth of being and thus helps the being of truth to find its site within the historical humankind.”⁵ With essential thinking, the central agency of man is being taken away, because it only pays heed to the event of the self-unconcealment of Being (*Ereignis*), and with this paying heed to that essential unfolding, man *ek-sists*. Essential thinking, Heidegger argues, recalls the question of Being as Being and thereby overcomes metaphysics since to think other than beings means that thinking has already been tired of it. Heidegger therefore calls for a ‘step back’ which calls for “a preparation which must be ventured

Essays, trans. and intro. William Lovitz (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 7.

³Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” in *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), 70-1.

⁴Martin Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?” in *Basic Writings*, trans. by Fred D. Wieck and John Gray ed. and intro. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 364.

⁵ Heidegger, Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?,” 237.

here and now.”⁶ This is so because time demands that it must be thought in our most thought-provoking times in terms of taking a ‘step back.’⁷

Jean Luc-Marion takes this Heideggerian invitation of taking a ‘step back’ in order to think God in an ordinary way since the question about God has not been spared from calculative thinking. Taking Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, Marion re-examines its history and proposes a way to think of God without falling into the God of onto-theology. Marion is thinking here of a possible kind of thinking that can let God present Himself as Himself and not from any conceptual representation of Him.

This paper aims to present Marion’s Heideggerian itinerary in his attempt to think God without falling into the same trap of onto-theology. We will do this by examining first another Heideggerian text, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, where we can find Heidegger’s religious allusions to the ungodly God that we have in our times. This examination of a fundamental Heideggerian text will lead us to the main question of this paper which is, how does Marion’s Phenomenology of the Icon answer Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysical notion of God? After that, we will discuss Marion’s affirmation of Heidegger’s critique and more importantly, his answer on how it is possible for us to think God away from onto-theology. A critical reflection will conclude our present investigation.

Heidegger on the Destitution of our Times

What Nietzsche’s madman did first when he arrived at the city with his lanterns was to ask, “where is God?” And the people replied, laughing, “what God? We have killed him!” And so the madman echoed their proclamation: “God is dead.” This Nietzschean critique of

⁶Heidegger, “Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” 51.

⁷Ibid., 52.

the place and role of God in our times invokes two powerful images, namely, the laughing murderous crowd and the madman seeking the God. In his lecture, *What are Poets For?* Heidegger laments the absence or better yet, the death of God in our times. For Heidegger, the death of God is the default of God in our times. He writes:

The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time, because it becomes ever more destitute. It has already grown so destitute, it can no longer discern the default of God as a default.⁸

This inability to think the destitution of our time is rooted in our failure to think what it is that calls us to thinking. In another lecture, Heidegger repeats the same sentiment where he says that "the most thought provoking in our thought-provoking times is that we are still not thinking."⁹ Our inability to be provoked and thus to continue living as if everything is well is conditioned by the prevailing mode of thinking, that is, the calculative. Where everything is reduced to objects, and where even God is understood merely as *causa efficiens*, the radiance that belongs to the all-majestic God is also forgotten. God as such remains to be thought in this time of thoughtlessness.

Not only has the God left in our times, "even the trace of the holy has become unrecognizable." Marion

⁸Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 91.

⁹Heidegger, "What Calls for Thinking?" 365.

continues: "It remains undecided whether we still experience the holy as the track leading to the godhead of the divine, or whether we now encounter no more than a trace of the holy."¹⁰ The effacement of the traces of the holy makes it more difficult for man to discern the concealment of the holy. The "death of God" leaves us in confusion whether what we refer to when we speak the word "God" pertains to God as such, or whether it refers to a mere expression of the logical necessity of the cause of everything.

What accounts for this inability to discern this destitution brought about by the fleeing of God?¹¹ In the

¹⁰Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 97.

¹¹It can be argued that for Heidegger, this question is not his concern as he remains faithful to *Seinsfrage*. He even makes it clear that the use of Being is not equivalent to God. Thus, this critique of the destitution of our time, to strictly follow Heidegger, remains in the realm of the oblivion of Being. He writes, "Concealedness exists inasmuch as the realm in which they belong together is the abyss of Being." (*Heidegger, Poetry, Language and Thought*, 97). This concealedness of God happens in the concealment of Being, which, according to him, happens in the very of destining of Being and no longer at the failure of man to think Being. Being itself hides itself. Hence, it can be argued that what we are referring to in this paper is but another "forced" interpretation of Heidegger to make him fit in the discussion of the question of God which is not his concern.

Nevertheless, at the turn of what is now being called the theological turn of phenomenology, Heidegger's suspension of the question of God is put under suspicion. Critics, including Marion, often point to the religious, albeit consistently suspended, allusions of Heidegger. They ask why Heidegger would not go further. Heidegger when asked in an interview (See: *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. London: The MIT Press, 1993), admits that while he it is not his main concern, the God question may be a big part of his thinking considering the fact that he was educated by a religious congregation. For our purposes, therefore, we use the question of God in Heidegger with caution. We have to be aware that for him, this all happens within the question of Being.

Heideggerian sense, this concealment of the holy is a form of *aletheia*, of the unfolding of Being.¹² The holy, therefore, unfolds as it does right now under a certain mode of revelation. The world that we have is a world flooded with objects made possible by calculative thinking. This kind of thinking springs from the will of human beings to overpower the world by reducing it under their command. The world then takes a different meaning. Heidegger says:

Correspondingly, human willing too can be in the mode of self-assertion only by forcing everything under its dominion from the start, even before it can survey it. To such a willing, everything, beforehand and thus subsequently, turns irresistibly into material for self-assertive production. The earth and its atmosphere become raw material. Man becomes human material...¹³

Hence, man fails to know that his time is the most destitute time, that his thinking is not concerned with what is essential, and that he is too preoccupied with his concern for self-assertive production which Heidegger calls the challenging mode of revealing. In this mode, man cannot think other than that which is functional. As Heidegger argues:

Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and the technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them. I do not know whether you are frightened, but I at any rate was frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to the earth. We don't need atomic bomb.

¹²Don Ihde, "Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology," in *Philosophy of Technology: An Anthology*. eds. Robert C. Schraff and Val Dusek (MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 278.

¹³*Ibid.*, 111.

The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on which man lives.¹⁴

With everything left to purely technological relationship, what follows is that whatever is revealed is revealed in its object-ness [*Gegenständigkeit*]. Needless to say, this kind of thinking and the relationship that goes with it does not, as it cannot, ask the holy as such but always only under the condition of functionality and object-ness. With regard to God, calculative thinking cannot think of God more than that which caused everything (*causa efficiens*) and that which grounds beings and Himself (*causa sui*). Just as the sky is no longer the sky where we look up and dream dreams as it is now a vast space where space shuttles and radars thrive, so is the earth no longer the earth we tread upon but a field of excavations and explorations. Just as man is no longer he who thinks about the essential things like death, love, angst, etc., as he becomes part of the system by being the “human resource,”¹⁵ so is the case of God, who, “for representational thinking, lose[s] all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can sink to the level of cause, of *causa efficiens*.”¹⁶ To this kind of God, “[m]an can neither pray

¹⁴Martin Heidegger, “Only A God Can Save Us”: Der Spiegel’s *Interview with Martin Heidegger in The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (London: The MIT Press, 1993), 105-6.

¹⁵ Heidegger describes the whole process that governs modern technology as having “the character of setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging forth” (Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 16).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

nor sacrifice...can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance. . ."17

For Heidegger, this kind of world that science and technology presents is *the* supreme danger¹⁸ in which we find ourselves entrapped. He thus calls for another way of thinking, a thinking that will let the *world* world on its own terms and where man only responds and pays heed for the bringing-forth, the coming-into-presence [*poeisis*] of that which is incalculable and therefore non-objectifiable.¹⁹ This Heidegger calls poetry, hence, the need for poets who "attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods."²⁰

Poetry, just like thinking, pays heed to that which calls on the very essence of man. Referring to Hölderlin whom Heidegger calls the "poet of poets," he writes:

Suppose, however, that this oblivion [of Being] were the hidden nature of the destituteness of what is destitute in the time. There would indeed be no time then for an aesthetic flight to Hölderlin's poetry.... But there would be, and there is, the sole necessity, by thinking our way soberly into what his poetry says, to come to learn what is unspoken. If we reach and enter that course, it will lead thinking into a dialogue with poetry, a dialogue that is of the history of Being.²¹

What is this sole necessity that Heidegger refers to and by which the dialogue between the thinker and poet can be possible? Heidegger beautifully puts it, almost sacredly, in the following:

¹⁷Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," 72.

¹⁸Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 26.

¹⁹ Ibid., 28.

²⁰Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 94.

²¹Ibid., 96.

The saying of the thinker comes from a long-protected speechlessness and from the careful clarifying of the realm thus cleared. Of like provenance is the naming of the poet. Yet because that which is like is so only as difference allows, and because poetizing and thinking are most purely alike in the care of the word, they are at the same time farthest separated in their essence. The thinker says being. The poet names the holy . . . We may know much about the relation between philosophy and poetry. Yet we know nothing of the dialogue between poets and thinkers, who “dwell near one another on mountains most separate.”²²

The poets and their poetry lead us to that trace of the holy where the godhead may find us once again. The poets attend to the unfolding of the holy which we may not be attentive to because of our objective concerns. The poets are those who experience the unholiness of our time and therefore step back to trace where the fugitive gods and their godhead have gone to. Only in these tracing of the holy, can we dwell once again as being-in-the-world.

Marion: The Phenomenology of the Idol and the Icon

Shifting his focus away from that of Heidegger who exposes two ways of revealing which happens either in calculative thinking or in essential thinking, Marion brings to mind two ways of vision, that which presents itself either as an idol or as an icon. These ways of seeing, moreover, decide the path where the re-arrival of the divine can take place. “The idol does not indicate, any more than the icon, a particular being or even class of beings. Icon and idol indicate a manner of being for beings,

²²Heidegger, Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?,” 237.

or at least for some of them.”²³ Moreover, these two are two modes of a *signum*, and for Marion, “it is only in signaling that the work has the value of a *signum*. One thus would have to interrogate the *signa* concerning their mode of signaling, suspecting that the idol and the icon are indistinguishable only inasmuch as they signal in different ways, that is, inasmuch as each makes use of its visibility in its own way.”²⁴

The Idol: Frozen Gaze

When the Jewish people extolled the golden calf, they saw it as their god, so they sang and danced to worship it, forgetting Moses’s admonitions against worshipping graven images. The pagans, we know, are accountable for the same offense. They worshipped the statues that they believed to be their gods.

What is decisive in this is the kind of seeing or gaze that is attributed to an other, or the question of godly stature of images. For Marion, when the gaze stops at the visible, that it can no longer see what is beyond it, then an idol is made:

The gaze makes the idol, not the idol the gaze – which means that the idol with its visibility fills the intention of the gaze, which wants nothing other than to see. The gaze precedes the idol because an aim precedes and gives rise to that at which it aims. The first intention aims at the divine and the gaze strains itself to see the divine, to see it by taking it up unto the field of the gazeable. The more powerfully the aim is deployed, the longer it sustains itself, the richer, more extensive, and more sumptuous will appear the idol on which it will

²³Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, foreword by David Tracy (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

stop its gaze. To stop the gaze: we could not do better than to say, to stop a gaze, allow it to rest (itself) in/on an idol, when it can no longer pass beyond.²⁵

The gaze that freezes in what Marion calls the first visible allows no room for the invisible. As it is frozen in what it sees, it is disabled, rendering it unable to look for something beyond. Marion compares an idol to an invisible mirror. When a man gazes at it, the mirror reflects the image of the gazer to himself, and moreover, the image that is sent back reflects the scope of the gaze that is given. The gazeable is what is found only within the limits of the mirror. What a man sees within that mirror bedazzles him and therefore consumes his gaze. Fulfilled and consumed, the idolatrous gaze fails to see what is beyond, what is outside the limit of the mirror that only gives back the scope of its very gaze. In the end, this immobilized gaze is no longer able to criticize what it sees as it already rests fulfilled in the image of the idol it created.

The idol, thus, is an image made in man's image, in the measure and scope of his gaze. This is how the idol, as a *signum* of the divine, presents an image of a god. The first visible, be it the golden calf, the statue, the saint, is affirmed to be the God as such. The worshipper's gaze is frozen. To use Heidegger's words, the idolatrous gaze is but the representation of that which cannot be gotten around.

Marion calls the "God" of metaphysics as conceptual idol. The "God" before whom Heidegger says no one can pray or kneel to, is supposed to be, according to Anselm, that which nothing greater can be thought of, and therefore completely escapes human understanding. As conceptual idol, "it knows the divine in its hold, and hence names "God," defines it. It defines it, and therefore also

²⁵Ibid., 11.

measures it to the dimension of its hold.”²⁶ Whatever can be defined, can be circumscribed; whatever is defined, is defined according to the measure of the one who defines; and lastly, whatever can be measured, can be objectified. Marion expounds:

In the idol, the divine indeed has a presence, and it indeed offers itself to an experience, but only starting from an aim and its limits. In a word, the divine is figured in the idol only indirectly, reflected according to the experience of it that is fixed by human authority—the divine actually experienced, is figured, however, only in the measure of the human authority that puts itself, as much as it can, to the test.²⁷

The human authority that calls for the presencing of that conceptual “God” is the authority that metaphysics had created when it tried to confer to “God” its different functions.²⁸ In those titles, “God” attains an essence which is reduced to its conceptual function. Nietzsche, Kant, Feuerbach, and Fichte have all considered “God” as the “moral God,” the author and guarantor of the moral order of the world. Thus, when Nietzsche’s madman proclaims the “death of God,” what he proclaims is the death of this “moral God.” Descartes *causa-sui* “God” also falls into this conceptual presencing of “God.”

Marion’s use of “human authority” that captures “God” in a concept echoes Heidegger’s critique of the will of man to overpower the world by reducing it to mere

²⁶Ibid., 29.

²⁷Ibid., 28.

²⁸Marion disagrees and criticizes Heidegger’s grand claim that the whole history of metaphysics is onto-theological. In his essay, *Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy*, Marion revisits Aquinas’ metaphysics and what he could have meant when he used “God” therein. In that same work, Marion exempts Aquinas from this charge of Heidegger.

object-ness. This is the same human authority that appropriates, that assumes the power to ordain and pronounce the reasonableness of a concept of a “God,” or that which assumes for itself the condition for possibility, that which assumes the function of giving sense, if any, to the notion of “God.” Thus, Marion believed that this kind of thinking fails to articulate the essential, the unspoken superabundance of God as such. Marion, affirming Heidegger, says:

[T]he conceptual idol has a site, metaphysics; a function, the theology in onto-theology; and a definition, *causa sui*. Conceptual idolatry does not remain a universally vague suspicion but inscribes itself in the global strategy of thought taken in its metaphysical figure. Nothing less than the destiny of Being—or better, Being as destiny—mobilizes conceptual idolatry and assures it a precise function.²⁹

With this affirmation, Marion readies himself to the Heideggerian invitation of an originary thinking, this time, of God as such. Marion is now poised to take the path toward a ‘step back,’ “[t]o reach a nonidolatrous thought of God, which alone releases “God” from his quotation marks by disengaging his apprehension from the condition posed by onto-theology. . .”³⁰

The Idol: The Invisible in/on the Visible

Why is it that the God who got mad with the golden calf is the same God that ordered that a staff be erected for the people to see when they were poisoned by snakes? To follow Marion, the decisive element lies in the gaze. The first showed a gaze frozen in/on its object of sight while the latter, the staff, showed a gaze that sees

²⁹Ibid., 36.

³⁰Ibid., 37.

what is invisible in the first visible in/on what is given beyond what is at hand.

The staff is an example of an icon because it is not exalted to a godly stature but merely signals that which is not immediately given; nevertheless, it also presents itself in what is visible. Marion explains what an icon is in the following:

The hermeneutic of the icon meant: the visible becomes the visibility of the invisible only if it receives its intention, in short, if it refers, as to intention, to the invisible; that is, the invisible envisages (as invisible) only in passing to the visible (as face), whereas the visible only presents to sight (as visible) in passing to the invisible (as intention). Visible and invisible grow together and as such: their absolute distinction implies the radical commerce of their transferences.³¹

The icon is a *signum* that does not freeze the gaze (for the gaze intends not to be dazzled by what is given) but intends toward what is beyond, that which cannot be gotten around by the visible. Marion in the above quote uses the Levinasian concept of the face. The other's immediate presentation to me, as the self, is by way of that which is most visible to me, the face. To reduce the face as an idol entails that I, myself, can totalize the other's face by reducing it to my gaze. Yet as an icon, the face presents itself to me as a visibility that cannot be confined, thus cannot be totalized, for what the face presents is more than itself, just as the person is always more than his face. Marion says that "[t]he icon alone offers an open face, because it opens in itself the visible onto the invisible, by offering its spectacle to be transgressed—not to be seen, but to be venerated."³²

³¹Ibid., 23.

³² Ibid., 19.

In the irreducibility of the visible and the invisible to each other, distance plays an important role. While the icon summons the invisible to appear in the visible, and thus bridges the distance between the two, it does not abolish the distance that separates and distinguishes one from the other. The abolition of distance makes an idol. Thus, in contrast with the idolatrous concept, Marion characterizes what makes a concept an icon and not an idol. In the following, he gives the hermeneutic and the theological characteristics of an icon:

- (a) Valid as icon is the concept or group of concepts that reinforces the distinction of the visible and the invisible as well as their union, hence that increases the one all the more that it highlights the other. Every pretension to absolute knowledge therefore belongs to the domain of the idol.
- (b) The icon has a theological status, the reference of the visible face to the intention that envisages, culminating in the reference of the Christ to the Father. . .
- (c) . . . the icon, as it summons to infinity – strictly – contemplation in distance, could not but overabundantly subvert every idol of the frozen gaze (as one opens a body with a knife), open its eyes upon a face.³³

This disposition to openness and distance is essential when Marion takes this understanding of what an icon is into the question of thinking “~~God~~” who is freed from his quotation marks. To think this way is to think other than the “~~God~~” of onto-theology.

As the icon signals that which is invisible, so our concept of ~~God~~ remains an iconic concept of His very essence, in other words, our notion of Him does not reduce Him to what we can think of Him. In Marion’s words, “[c]oncerning God, let us admit clearly that we can think him only under the figure of the unthinkable, but of an

³³Ibid., 24.

unthinkable that exceeds as much as what we cannot think as what we can; for that which I may not think is still the concern of *my* thought, and hence to *me* remains thinkable."³⁴ Thus, even the analogies that we make in order to name God remains essentially insufficient to know God as such. This is where Marion clarifies for Heidegger what Thomas Aquinas means when he uses analogy in the saint's discourses on God. For Marion, Aquinas' notion that God is *ipsum esse subsistence* emphasizes that his essence is completely beyond any understanding, and that the use of *esse* remains to be analogical, where analogy "does not mean the tangential univocity of *esse commune*, but on the contrary, it opens a space where the univocity of being must be exploded."³⁵ Thus, in the end, all what we can have, or better, we must have, about God as such is a conceptual icon of Him, ever respecting that unbridgeable chasm that separates God as such and the icon we have of Him.

Marion, in freeing "God" from his quotation marks (~~God~~), does not mean that "God would have to disappear as a concept, or intervene only in the capacity of a hypothesis in the process of validation, but that the unthinkable enters into the field of our thought only by rendering itself unthinkable there by excess, that is, by criticizing our thought."³⁶ The arrival of this God is what Marion calls a saturated phenomenon, inexhaustible and only presents to our mind the excess of His superabundance. In the many names that we call God, in the end, nothing names Him as such more than the single name of love. For as God goes beyond the reasons and conditions where metaphysics established its history, love, a gift, also is without reason. That God is love, for Marion, means that "love loves without condition, simply because

³⁴Ibid., 46.

³⁵Jean Luc-Marion, *Thomas Aquinas and Onto-the-logy in Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, eds. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 49.

³⁶Marion, *God Without Being*, 46.

it loves; he thus loves without limit or restriction."³⁷ This arrival of the divine, of God, is traced on the tracks made out of His superabundance and love, so abundant that it does not ask for condition even of being "[f]or love holds nothing back, neither itself nor its representation,"³⁸ is an arrival that is no longer constrained in onto-theology. In the end, Marion not only traces these tracks of God, but even makes Him play a game that is even different and beyond Heidegger's notion of being. Marion says, "[e]sse refers to God only insofar as God may appear without being—not only without being as onto-theology constitutes it in metaphysics but also well out of the horizon of being, even as it is such (Heidegger)."³⁹

This God that does not ask for condition, even that of Being, is what we have to attend to in the icons that show where the tracks of the fugitive divine may finally lead us to think the destitution of our time.

Icon: Towards the Re-Arrival of the "Fugitive God"

When Heidegger criticized the present danger of the technological condition, he did not only complain about the technologies that change the way we live, but more than this, his criticism is more focused on how technology presents the world through technology's ordering-challenging mode of revelation. This is also the mode that metaphysics in its onto-theological constitution sees and shows the world. It only thinks of what can be an object of its investigation, the beings, and thereby forgets that which remains to be thought, that which cannot be gotten around, Being.

In the same way, Marion criticizes the concepts of "God" that define and therefore put limits to the essence of God as such. The different onto-theologic understanding

³⁷Ibid., 47.

³⁸Ibid., 48.

³⁹Marion, *Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theology*, 64.

of "God" are what Marion calls the conceptual idols of metaphysics. For Heidegger as for Marion, if this would be the condition of thinking "God," then, "[t]he god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is ... perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit."⁴⁰

The metaphysical fixation to objects and to the idolatrous concept of "God" however is still the prevalent mode of thinking in our time. Man's failure to think that which calls his very essence, either because he does not attend to it or because Being has concealed itself, is for Heidegger, the danger in our destitute time. On this long destitute night, Heidegger supposes "there must be mortals who reach sooner into the abyss"⁴¹ for they are the ones who will experience the horror and danger and that abyss.

Theists and atheists alike fall into this very danger. Thus, Marion points out to us the gaze that does not freeze into its first visible and therefore creates an idol, rather that gaze that looks at the visible as a *signum* of the invisible, the icon. Icon shows God in the visible but does not pretend to exhaust Him on that visible. On the contrary, when a gaze looks at an icon of God, its intentionality is invited to go toward that which cannot be grasped, ever respecting that distance that separates yet connects, and looks at what is given as a vision that flows only from the superabundance of the God that is ever beyond human understanding.

With this notion of an icon, Marion takes Heidegger's invitation of a 'step back' in order to think that which is essential, in Marion's case, God freed from his quotation marks. Not only does Marion take this invitation, he also fulfills Heidegger's consistent suspension of a discussion concerning God. Was

⁴⁰Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," 72.

⁴¹Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 117.

Heidegger “afraid” of falling into onto-theology if he would discuss God, or was the question of God not only his concern? Suffice it to say that Marion’s phenomenology of the icon breaks the impasse issuing from this Heideggerian hesitation.

With the icon, man knowingly accepts that what he is seeing or thinking about God is nothing of the essence of God as such. Yet, this awareness does not cause him despair or a sense of failure for he cannot know that which he wants to know, but on the contrary, shows him once again his very essence as *ek-sistence*, as one who only awaits for the unfolding of truth. With this, he becomes at home with his self as a mortal once again, and dwell on earth again.

For Heidegger, “*poetry* is a measuring.”⁴² Man, looking up to the heaven, measures himself against the divinities and looks at his own essence as being-towards-death. Why is the heaven the measure of man? Heidegger writes,

The measure consists in the way in which god who remains unknown, is revealed as such by the sky. God’s appearance through the sky consists in a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment. Thus the unknown god appears as by way of the sky’s manifestness. This appearance is the measure against which man measures himself.⁴³

We can recall also that for Heidegger, in the destitution of time, what we need are poets who would attend singing and dancing to the re-arrival of the fugitive gods whose measure is their godhead, and the poets who trace the tracks of the divine. In the following, Heidegger

⁴²Ibid., 221.

⁴³Ibid., 223.

describes what a poet does in the midst of the concealment of the divine:

Yet the poet, if he is a poet, does not describe the mere appearance of sky and earth. The poet calls, in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself. In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is – unknown.⁴⁴

Thus, Marion faithfully follows the calling of his destitute time, our time, by showing us that which hides in what reveals, and how that which hides, reveals himself in an icon. The caution that Marion gives us, that is, to mistake the invisible for the visible, to reduce ~~God~~ to “God,” is the caution that beckons our thinking to pay heed to what is unknown as unknown in whatever we come to know of it.

To this aim, Marion sets his phenomenology of the icon. The way the icon shows that which remains unknown is its poetry. Behind this poetry is the heart that waits for the re-arrival of the fugitive, the heart of the poet.

⁴⁴Ibid., 225.

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